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Comments: Please do not allow the expansion of the Lutsen Mountain Ski area. As we stare down climate change, this is a really bad idea. The use of more water from Lake Superior, the clearing of white cedars and mature sugar maple stands is a very bad idea. The resulting pollution, use of energy and destruction of fragile and irreplaceable ecosystems is short-sighted and dangerous for our future.

Please see the following from an article by Staci L. Drulliard:

"Lloyd Scherer's large-scale legacy of conservation and preservation came to pass more formally in 1991, when he contributed to the future of the highland forests along Lake Superior by donating a 240-acre parcel of land along the ridges of the Sawtooth Mountains to the Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA) Program of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Known as the Scherer Conservation Unit of the SNA, the Minnesota DNR purchased an adjoining 480 acres in 1993 to form the 720-acre Lutsen Scientific and Natural Area. The SNA designation isn't easy to accomplish and this little-known conservation area, directly adjacent to the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area, remains untouched and untrammled, just as Lloyd promised it would be. He had saved and conserved his own resources to purchase the land between 1968-1979, with the express purpose of protecting it from development.

SNA lands are indeed legacy land masses, serving to provide baseline scientific information used to increase understanding about managing other natural areas in the state. In fact, the Lake Superior "highlands" that rise up 1,000 feet or more above the North Shore have been identified as among the 24 most diverse landscapes in the state. The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota confirms that "this northern forest ecosystem hosts a diversity of life unlike any other in the continental U.S., including more breeding bird species than any other landscape in Minnesota."

This is the same habitat found along the adjoining Eagle and Moose Mountain ridges, which are part of the area currently being considered for a special-use permit (SUP) from the U.S. Forest Service, as requested by Lutsen Mountains Corporation. If granted, the SUP could clear and dedicate up to 495 acres of public land within the Superior National Forest to a privately owned enterprise that is not even required to disclose its private financial information to the public in order to prove its claim that a failure to expand would be a detriment to its profitability. The company's plan to "enhance the existing terrain variety and skiing experiences" of its guests would add to the already significant fragmentation of the Superior Highlands ecosystem, while creating economic barriers to public land access. In spite of its location directly adjacent to the proposed development, the Lutsen SNA and the status of the Superior Highlands as one of the most diverse in the state is not mentioned at all in the U.S. Forest Service's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) - not even once.

It's also very important to note that every acre of the proposed ski hill expansion is firmly within the boundaries of the 1854 Treaty lands, where Band members at Grand Portage, Fond du Lac and Bois Forte retain usufructuary rights to hunt, fish and gather resources, as guaranteed by the Treaty of 1854. The Grand Portage Band has already contributed a letter of concern to the public record, particularly about the prevalence of mature maple stands (sugarbush stands) and white cedar stands that would be lost to the expansion. Both of these native tree species are identified as "vulnerable to extirpation" in the U.S. Forest Service's DEIS analysis, with significant losses to these already fragile stands laid out in the DEIS options grid. There is also the matter of traditional use, and the chipping away at Treaty lands that are often part-and-parceled out to non-Native SPU holders - individuals and companies that are profiting directly from the resources supported by Treaty lands, all the while limiting access for Ojibwe people, who are the designated co-managers of those lands, as specified in the Treaty of 1854.

Let's be clear: Once the nine new chairlifts are erected and the new chalet is built at the top of the mountain, only people who can pay the price of a lift ticket will be allowed through the gates. This is perhaps the most important socioeconomic concern about the proposed SUP, and one that's not addressed in the Forest Service DEIS."